# Who Keeps Water Safe?

How government powers shape drinking water policy

**AWH.P.2.1.B** "Evaluate the impact of the structure and powers exercised by governmental systems on public policy, using historical and contemporary examples."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline a federal, a state, and a local power in the passage. Circle two policy outcomes, then write matching numbers beside the powers that help explain each outcome.

### From Law to Tap

1 In 1974, Congress passed the Safe Drinking Water Act after concerns about contaminants in public water supplies. The law gave the Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA, power to set national drinking water standards. States could run their own drinking water programs if they met federal requirements; local utilities still treated and delivered water. This divided system could give every community a minimum level of protection while letting states supervise nearby utilities. Yet federal standards did not automatically make every tap safe. Their effect depended on state enforcement and on choices made by the utilities that operated water systems.

2 In 2014, Flint, Michigan, switched its water source to the Flint River while under a state-appointed emergency manager. The city's water system did not use corrosion control treatment needed to keep lead from leaching out of old pipes. Michigan regulators failed to require that treatment, and residents reported discolored water and health concerns. State control over the city's finances had helped drive the search for a cheaper water source, but the split between state oversight and local operation left room for dangerous decisions. In 2016, the EPA issued an emergency order requiring steps to protect residents.

3 Congress responded to the wider problem of lead pipes in 2021 by passing a law that set aside $15 billion for lead service line replacement nationwide. Federal money flows through state drinking water programs to support local projects. A city can replace pipes, but it must locate them and organize the work; a state helps distribute funds. This arrangement can fund repairs that small communities could not easily afford alone. It can also slow results if local pipe records are incomplete or projects take time to plan. Comparing these cases shows that funding, oversight, and daily operation shape policy together.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could the division of powers under the 1974 law both protect communities and leave some taps unsafe?

2. How did the state-appointed manager's power help shape Flint's water policy in 2014?

3. Why did state oversight not prevent the danger from Flint's water source change?

4. How could the 2021 funding law improve water safety, and why might its impact take time?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a state can require public schools to offer free breakfast, while local school boards choose menus and schedules. Propose a policy to increase breakfast participation, explain how both levels of government would shape it, and evaluate one benefit and one limit.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.P.2.1.B

## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline a federal, a state, and a local power in the passage. Circle two policy outcomes, then write matching numbers beside the powers that help explain each outcome. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | How could the division of powers under the 1974 law both protect communities and leave some taps unsafe? | **EPA standards set a national minimum, but safe water still depended on state enforcement and local utilities' decisions.** |
| 2 | How did the state-appointed manager's power help shape Flint's water policy in 2014? | **State control over city finances helped drive the search for a cheaper water source, leading to the switch to the Flint River.** |
| 3 | Why did state oversight not prevent the danger from Flint's water source change? | **Michigan regulators failed to require corrosion control treatment, and the city's water system did not use it. Lead could then leach from old pipes.** |
| 4 | How could the 2021 funding law improve water safety, and why might its impact take time? | **Federal funding can help communities replace lead pipes they could not easily afford to replace alone. Cities must locate the pipes and plan the work, which can take time.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The state should require every public school to offer free breakfast, and local boards should serve it just after the first bell. The state's requirement would make access consistent across districts, while each board could choose a schedule and menu that fit its schools. Serving breakfast after the bell could help students who arrive too late for an earlier meal. However, boards with limited staff might struggle to serve everyone quickly, so the same rule might work unevenly.

Accept other supported judgments about how divided powers affected water policy. For Your Turn, look for a proposed policy, distinct state and local roles, and a plausible benefit and limit.